DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 557 CS 506 328

AUTHOR Ciofalo, Andrew
TITLE A Perspective on Internship Grading Problems and a Solution.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; *Evaluation Methods; Grade Inflation; *Grading; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; Mass Media; Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS Educational Issues; *Loyola College MD

ABSTRACT

Several critical questions are raised by the proliferation of communications internships, yet the question of grading and evaluating internships is one that can be answered by examining the Media Program at Loyola College in Maryland. Although the communications curriculum was not fully developed until the 1986-87 academic year, enrollments in the program increased dramatically in 1983-84, when internship opportunities were expanded. In examining the grades college-wide for Loyola interns, a pattern emerged indicating that internships resulted in grade inflation, a danger which can undermine respect for a discipline. The Writing/Media Department addressed this problem by asking internships' supervisors to rate intern performance in 20 categories (including resourcefulness, graphic and editing skills, and ability to contribute to the organization), using a 1-5 numerical rating system, instead of giving the interns a final letter grade. The evaluator's focus thus shifted from the consideration of an overall grade to a specific appraisal of attributes that indicate successful professional performance. After implementation of this grading procedure, registration for media internships decreased from the usual 25 to 8 for the fall 1987 semester, indicating that grades may have been a factor in the extensive participation in the internship program. (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED298557

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Andrew Ciofalo
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNSHIP GRADING PROBLEMS AND A SOLUTION

Andrew Ciofalo
Associate Professor of Writing and Media
Loyola College in Maryland

Running Head: Grading Interns

CS506328

Problems in grading and evaluating student performance in internships must be resolved despite the continuing larger debate among masscom faculties over their academic legitimacy.[1] There would have been no urgency in the 1950s when few students engaged in internships and those that did were permitted to do so either because of their excellent academic records or to fulfill requirements for graduate programs in journalism.[2] But now the proliferation of communications internships[3] challenges the pedagogy of undergraduate communications curricula and raises some critical questions.

First, is the increased accessibility of internships a by-product of increased careerism among students? Second, have the students discovered that their classroom experiences do not prepare them to meet the high standards of the professions? And third, are internships simply easy courses yielding high grades that raise the communications major's grade point average?

The first two questions belong to the larger debate over legitimacy, but the question of grading and evaluating internships is one that can be answered quickly and with immediate results, as we have discovered in Loyola College's Media Program.

The problem with grading has not emerged solely because the number of students taking internships has grown exponentially. There is also a subtle historical residue left from the temporary shift when masscom's experiential learning base moved from on-

campus activities to off-campus internships in the 1960s.

Internships did not begin to proliferate in most professional disciplines until late in the 1960s.[4] They appeared in conjunction with the student-consumer movement and lowered academic standards resulting from student-led opposition to the Viet Nam War. Given that dubious birthright, it is no wonder that even well-conceived and well-managed internships like The Field Studies Program at the University of California, Berkeley were retrenched[5] in the wake of the budget-crunching inflationary recession at the beginning of this decade.

While the "student revolution" had a direct effect in other disciplines, giving rise to internship programs, it devastated existing experiential learning in mass communications. Journalism programs, in particular, used to deliver practical experience to their majors through a direct affiliation with campus newspapers and other media. But militant students and politicized advocates of "new journalism" seized editorial control of these instruments, creating liabilities for journalism schools and departments, whose faculties and budgets were vulnerable to institutional retribution for the excesses of campus-based media. Wisely or not, J-schools and departments either divested themselves of or terminated working agreements with the student press, leaving a large gap in faculty supervised opportunities for practical experience. Internships became the alternative in order "to take up the slack in practical experience."[6]

There is a major difference, however, between on-campus and

off-campus experience. Full-time faculty are directly involved in the former and only marginally so in the latter. Yet full credit for "experiential learning" was reapplied from one format to the other, despite the fact that the role of the faculty was reduced to that of gatekeeper, monitor and/or clerk.

The transfer of primary responsibility for the internship grade to a non-faculty entity (the editor) challenges the academic credibility of the major and whittles down the doctoral standing of the discipline as it seeks a special place at the cusp between the humanities and social sciences.

Accordingly, among masscom faculties there is a nascent sentiment that could potentially swell into a backlash to decertify internships, if not to eliminate them altogether.[7] However, like Coca-Cola, it is difficult to take a successful and widely accepted product off the market. Instead, one might consider reducing the appeal of the internship by altering one of its most attractive features --the easy grade-- as Loyola's Media Program did.

Having spent four years speaking to prospective communications majors at Loyola College, I have never ceased to be amazed at the interest in media education shown by Loyola underclassmen and high school seniors. Until the 1986-87 academic year, a fully-developed communications curriculum never appeared in the college catalog. All that was available was a truncated half-major in media that a student was able to combine with a half-major in almost any other discipline. Yet enrollments

increased five-fold to 180 in four years.

The one evident change was the sudden expansion of the Media Program's internship opportunities in 1983-84. The internships were given high visibility in the college catalog, each with its own course number under journalism, broadcast, advertising, public relations, publishing and graphics.

Private interviews with prospective freshmen by media faculty and admissions officers and open questions on college visitation days revealed a universal interest in the internship program. Although this evidence is anecdotal, it seems that the variety of available media internships, coupled with a liberal college policy on internship education, provided the primary fuel for launching entering freshmen and others into the media split-major. The lack of courses and technical facilities at the time did not deter the first rush of interest.

Obviously there is a danger that masscom and other professional disciplines will succumb to the "sexiness" of internships as enrollment builders, or simply respond to student demand without fully understanding the nature of experiential learning. But the danger that most visibly undermines respect for the discipline is grade inflation, and Loyola found internship grading to be a primary contributing factor.

In examining the grades college-wide for Loyola interns a pattern emerges that indicates internships result in grade inflation. What is the value of a course and what does it tell us about a student's performance and ability if the grade is usually

an "A"?[8] The internship experience at Loyola College during the 1985-86 academic year offers some startling consistencies in grading practices across most disciplines offering internships. (Some disciplines sponsoring one or two internships were excluded from the study as being atypical.)

During that period, 77 college-wide internships were run without requiring a weekly class meeting. The GPA (4.00 = A) for internship courses by discipline averaged out as follows:

Fall 1985

Poli Science	4.00
Writing:	4.00
Business:	4.00
English:	4.00
Media:	3:84
Fine Arts:	3.67

Summer 1986

Business:	4.00
Sociology:	4.00
Media:	3.67

Spring 1986

Poli Science	4.00
Psychology:	4.00
Theology:	4.00
Media:	3.79
Fine Arts:	3.71

The Writing/Media Department addressed the problem of grade inflation by making a simple change in their evaluative procedures. Instead of asking internships supervisors to assign a final grade, we asked them only to rate intern performance in 20 categories, using a 1 (outstanding) to 5 (poor) numerical rating system. (We had noticed that supervisor ratings generally did not reflect their recommended grades.) The result was that the overall GPA for media interns fell to 3.0, which is what one would expect from upperclassmen taking advanced electives in their majors.

By breaking down the evaluation into as many categories as possible, the Media Program insured that idiosyncratic low ratings in a few categories would not skew the final grade. The 20 categories we use actually guide the internship supervisor step by step through the evaluative process. The evaluator's focus is thus shifted from the consideration of an overall grade to a highly specific appraisal of each attribute that indicates a successful professional performance. And by assigning a graduated numerical rating to each attribute, we have reduced the assignment of a final grade to a simple mathematical averaging that students are accustomed to and understand.

This system, besides bringing down the GPA for internship courses, has eliminated the inevitable grade challenges by internship students receiving anything less than an "A" from supervisiors who never administered a test or graded a piece of

written or graphic work. The following are the numerical averages and their letter grade equivalents:

1.00 to 1.25 = A

1.26 to 1.75 = B+

1.76 to 2.00 = B

2.01 to 2.25 = B-

2.26 to 2.75 = C+

2.76 to 3.00 = C

3.00 to 3.25 = C-

3.26 to 4.25 = D

4.26 to 5.00 = F

The categories the Loyola communication students are rated on include:[9]

--promptness

--resourcefulness

--maturity

--interest in job

--ability to learn

--creativity

--writing skills

--editing skills

--graphic skills

--photography skills

--speed

--accuracy

--ability to communicate

--ability to organize

--ability to work with others

--ability to work under deadline pressure

--ability to contribute to the organization

--understanding of organizational procedures

--acceptance and constructive use of criticism

--promise of success in the profession

Registration for media internships was down from the usual 25 to 8 for the Fall 1987 semester, indicating that grades may have been a factor in the extensive participation in the internship program. A survey of 148 Loyola interns (32% response) seemed to support this contention.

The respondents represented a proportional mix of graduates and current students spanning the first four years of the internship program. Almost half the students (43%) admitted that an "easy grade" was a factor in their decision to register for an internship. (Loyola communication students average two internships during their baccalaureate careers, ranging from a single internship to four.)

The two highest-rated factors cited by the surveyed communications students as "important" reasons for doing an internship were motivated by practical and career-oriented thinking. Most students (79%) used internships to test their interest in one of the media fields and 78% used internships to build a base of experience for inclusion on their resumes.

Thus it is apparent that students are not taking media

internships for what they can learn but rather for very utilitarian reasons. It is astonishing to witness seniors who have received a "B" for an internship course pleading for a higher grade because, as one said, "How can I explain this on a job interview?" While most students say they aren't looking for an easy grade, the Loyola experience indicates that a more realistic grading policy could result in reduced internship enrollments. That would narrow the internship base down to the more serious and better students who then could be directed to higher quality internships. Eliminated from the internship scene, at least from a college certified internship experience, would be the weaker internships and those dilettantes that are attracted to them.

1. Bruce Garrison, "Post internship seminar can solve academic credit, grading problems of internship programs," Journalism Educator, Vol. 36, No. 1 (April 1981), pp. 14-17.

2.Alan Scott and Vernon Bowen, "Publishers and Students Favor Summer Internships Plan," Journalism Quarterly, (June 1949), pp. 197-99.

3. Garrison (1981), op. cit.

4. John De Mott, "Newspaper Internships in Education for Journalism: The Historical Perspective," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism, (August 1979).

5. Jon Wagner,"Integrating the Traditions of Experiential Learning in Internship Education," Journal of Experiential Learning (Fall 1983), p. 9.

6. Warren K. Agee, "Trends in the Development of News-Editorial Curriculums," paper presented to the newspaper division of the Association for Education in Journalism, (1966), p. 13.

7. Garrison (1981), op. cit.

8. Ibid.

9. Adapted from Lynne S. Gross, The Internship Experience, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Inc. 1981).